

[By Reps. Peter Welch and Reid Ribble](#)

Back home in Vermont and Wisconsin, one of the most frequent questions we hear is: Why can't Congress work together and get something done?

As our constituents know, and as we – a Republican and Democrat in Congress – have experienced firsthand, today's Washington too often approaches public policy challenges as ideological battles to win, rather than practical problems to solve. As the "to do" list in Washington gets longer and longer, it is no wonder Congressional approval ratings are at historic lows.

Unfortunately, there is no guarantee that the recent election will fix the problem. Over 90 percent of incumbents were reelected. And despite the billions of dollars spent on campaigns, we ended up roughly where we started: with President Obama in the White House, Democrats controlling the Senate, and Republicans controlling the House of Representatives.

On Jan. 14, both of us will join a daylong event in New York City to discuss with members of Congress and more than a thousand citizens, thought leaders, and elected officials how we can move forward on problem solving in Washington. The event is being organized by No Labels, a national grassroots movement of Republicans, Democrats, and everyone in-between.

In New York, No Labels will present a new group of 25 "problem-solver" members of Congress who will commit to regular meetings so we can build trust across the aisle and try to do something about this country's challenges. Our motto is: "Stop fighting, start fixing."

There will always be ideological differences among members of Congress on the big issues of the day. Such debate is a natural, beneficial offshoot of a vibrant representative democracy. But we should not allow ideological disagreements to derail us from making practical progress for America.

Although we are of different parties, we are finding areas of agreement because we are actively seeking them out. Instead of focusing on the issues where we disagree, we are looking for where we can find consensus. Working together to solve problems does not mean abandoning our principles. It simply means trying to appreciate and understand other points of view and find common ground for the good of the nation.

We know each other from our work on the House Committee on Agriculture, and we find there is a lot we actually agree on. On dairy and agricultural issues, we see common ground where we can make progress for rural America.

On energy policy, we're looking beyond party labels and working to promote energy efficiency. No matter your view on energy policy, we can all agree that using less energy is a good place to start. And we both believe that a strong and prosperous 21st century economy requires a robust infrastructure. There isn't a Democrat or Republican way to build a bridge or fix a pothole.

Our desire for a new approach in Washington goes beyond seeking areas of shared policy goals. It also means embracing a new tone and adopting a new willingness to sit down with political and ideological opponents. As a Republican congressman who has braved multiple MSNBC appearances and a Democratic congressman who regularly appears on Fox News, we know firsthand that members of Congress can venture into the lions' den and emerge unscathed.

We are optimistic because there is a growing number of legislators from both sides of the aisle who are hearing the same thing back home. We encourage our colleagues and our constituents to learn more about our new group and its problem-solving focus by visiting the site: [nolabels.org](http://nolabels.org).

Neither of us will dilute our beliefs nor sacrifice our principles. We simply recognize that partisan labels should not prevent us from sitting down and solving problems – together.